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Silicon Lounge

'Military investigators will scour gay chat rooms'

Don't Ask, Don't Surf

Gay military personnel must use computers with care

Perhaps it's the ultimate irony. Those who agree to die for U.S. freedom can lose their jobs for typing the wrong words on a computer screen. You know, words like "gay" and "homosexual."

Sailor Timothy McVeigh (no relation to the Murrah building bomber) was targeted under the military's obtuse "don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue" policy for revealing his homosexuality online. He didn't exactly advertise it in a Web banner ad, mind you. The military had to dig a little deeper into his closet to nail the "outstanding role model," as he was called in a pre-queer-hunt performance review.

McVeigh e-mailed a fellow crewman's wife to solicit toys for charity. His AOL user name was "boysrch." The nosy gentlewoman looked up his user profile and found McVeigh listed as "gay" and that he was into "boy watching." Good military spouse that she is, she outed him.

A Navy investigator called America Online for the gay boy's full name and address. Interestingly, AOL admits it violated its confidentiality agreement by sharing his name, but says it didn't know the private eye worked for the government, which has to have a subpoena. (Somehow that doesn't seem very comforting.)

After doing quite a bit of asking and pursuing, the Navy lost — but not without changing the life of a 17-year veteran with a perfect record. Although the homophobic Navy wanted McVeigh ousted and his pension pulled, the sailor fought back and won.

McVeigh had been the top enlisted man on a nuclear submarine — with no reports of leading a jock raid, showing up for duty in drag or even forcing boy underlings into an underwater Tailhook.

While he fought to stay in the service that spurned him, McVeigh got to oversee trash removal — and suffered a pay cut. Fortunately, a federal judge ruled in March that the Navy had to return McVeigh to a comparable job and pay his legal expenses. That means you and I pay the bill.

The Navy has two months to tuck their homophobic curiosity back into their pants and put McVeigh back where he belongs, the judge held, using slightly different words.

"The Navy violated the very essence of 'don't ask, don't pursue' by launching a search and destroy mission," District Judge Stanley Sporkin wrote.

Meanwhile, McVeigh's case has had a chilling effect on military computer usage. The "don't ask, don't tell" compromise supposedly allows soldiers to be gay on their own time, even going to gay bars and parades without a military dick trailing them. But, McVeigh's case emphasized the need to be careful — even in the privacy of one's own bedroom — while using a computer.

Ironically, the service branch known for its sexual harassment of women is the one that violates the "don't pursue" policy the most. Last year, the Navy violated the rights of homosexual solders 46 times, according to the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network Website (www.sldn.org).

The D.C.-based SLDN is a legal-aid group formed to protect gay soldiers. The Website includes a survival guide with a section devoted to computers. "Many service members believe their computer correspondence and online discussions are safe," the site warns. "They are not."

SLDN tells us that information from computer drives, disks, e-mail and online services is being used to target homosexual service men and women. Military investigators will even scour gay chat rooms to see who they can catch flirting (and to get a few forbidden jollies themselves, perhaps?).

It gets worse. SLDN attorneys warn that even personal computers and disks have been searched for gay dirt — with some investigators even using Norton Utilities to retrieve deleted files.

The morals of this story are plenty. First, the military's living in the Dark Ages. Second, avoid being a gay military computer geek. Third, if you can't keep your hands off your joystick, become a military investigator. Then you have a good excuse. ⚡

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Earth Week Events

Coming out

An new amalgam of environmental groups is expected to announce itself this Tuesday, April 21. Calling itself the **Environmental Alliance**, this coalition is being formed to boost the clout of the area's smaller green cells as well as garner more support for regional environmental concerns. The announcement comes at 8 p.m. during a special Earth Day event at Centennial Hall, located on the corner of Vermijo Street and Cascade Avenue.

But the big coming out for the Environmental Alliance comes after another important event for area outdoor fans. **The Colorado Mountain Club**, in conjunction with the Sierra Club, will kickoff their "Leave No Trace Program," an effort that generally fosters the idea that when you hike into the hills, you oughta — ya know — leave 'em like you found 'em!! Yeah, that's right, I'm talking to you!! That kick-off happens at 7 p.m. during the Centennial Hall Earth Day Event.

But all this down-to-Earth fun starts even earlier, at 6 p.m., when local environmental groups set up tables that are guaranteed to be chock full of subversive, tree-huggin' propaganda that challenges our God-given right to destroy the Good Lord's creation. Forgive them, Jesus, they know not what they do!

Air Force goes to the trees

For the fifth consecutive year, the National Arbor Day Foundation has named the Air Force Academy a "Tree City USA." John Rosenow, the foundation's president, said that "a community's tree-planting program is a living memorial to a citizen's concern for the quality of life." The award will be presented at 9:30 a.m. on Friday, April 17, at Pine Valley Elementary School.

vent WIPP from opening, and Hancock said the agency has still not complied with several court-ordered requirements.

The WIPP site itself is located in the middle of the nation's largest fertilizer-production area and is on top of a pressurized pool of brine, Hancock said. If the nuclear material escapes, it could contaminate the ground water and the nearby Pecos River.

Bill Weida, a Colorado College professor who has worked actively with the national Alliance for Nuclear Accountability, said the DOE's own environmental impact studies show that leaving the contaminated material where it is — at least for the time being — is both safer and far cheaper than transporting it to WIPP.

"But this is a bureaucracy that is supposed to move along to its goal, and they have to continue, come hell or high water," Weida said. "The whole thing seems so undoable and improbable, but they are going ahead with it."

However, Donna Fair, director of Emergency Services for the City of Colorado Springs, called such safety and environmental concerns overblown.

"This is extremely low level, compared to other things transported on the highway that we don't know about," Fair said. "Chlorine is much more dangerous than something like this."

City firefighters have trained with the DOE to be able to respond to any WIPP-related accidents, Fair said, and the city's response in the case of an emergency would be similar to any other hazardous material clean-up.

The federal agency, Fair said, has verbally agreed to notify the city when the trucks will be traveling through the area, although the city has not secured an agreement in writing. ⚡

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